

Tips to Informal Caregivers on Giving Personal Care

Suspected Heart Attack

Heart attacks usually occur when one of the blood vessels supplying the heart becomes blocked. The person will typically experience pain and shortness of breath. The pain is in the chest and often radiates to the left shoulder, neck and arm. The person may be very pale or have a bluish discoloration of the lips, skin and fingernail beds. As a rule, the person is in shock. A heart attack may be accompanied by loss of consciousness.

It is imperative to take immediate action when intense pressure, tightness or squeezing in the center of the chest persists for 5 minutes or more. When it spreads across the chest or to either shoulder or arm, neck or jaw and when it is associated with sweating, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath or fainting, time is critical.

- Place the person in a comfortable position such as sitting up.
- If breathing stops, immediately begin mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- Have someone call an ambulance and notify the person's physician.
- Do not give liquids to an unconscious person.
- If the heart stops beating, CPR must be done by someone who has had training in this technique. Most rescue squad and ambulance workers have had this training. The American Red Cross and American Heart Association offer CPR training through local chapters.

The above statements are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. You should always consult with your physician about any health and lifestyle concerns or issues you may have.